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AUTHOR Molloy, Dawn Eddy
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ABSTRACT

This performance guide is designed for teachers to use with students before and after a performance of "Little Women," adapted for the stage by Paulette Laufer and based on the novel by Louisa May Alcott. The guide, called a "Cuesheet," contains seven activity sheets for use in class, addressing: (1) From Novel to Stage Play (with background information about the story setting and the change from novel to play); (2) Characters and Resources (describing the characters and showing how three actors play the 10 roles); (3) Costumes (how characters' costumes reveal age, social status and attitudes); (4) Lines (from the play, with questions to discuss); (5) Adapting a Novel for the Stage/Script It! (getting a feel for the playwright adapter's job by trying some adaptation); (6) Your Script; and (7) Rigmarole (telling a story by playing Jo's favorite game) and The Final Collaborator (looking at the audience's role). (SR)

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by Dawn Eddy Molloy

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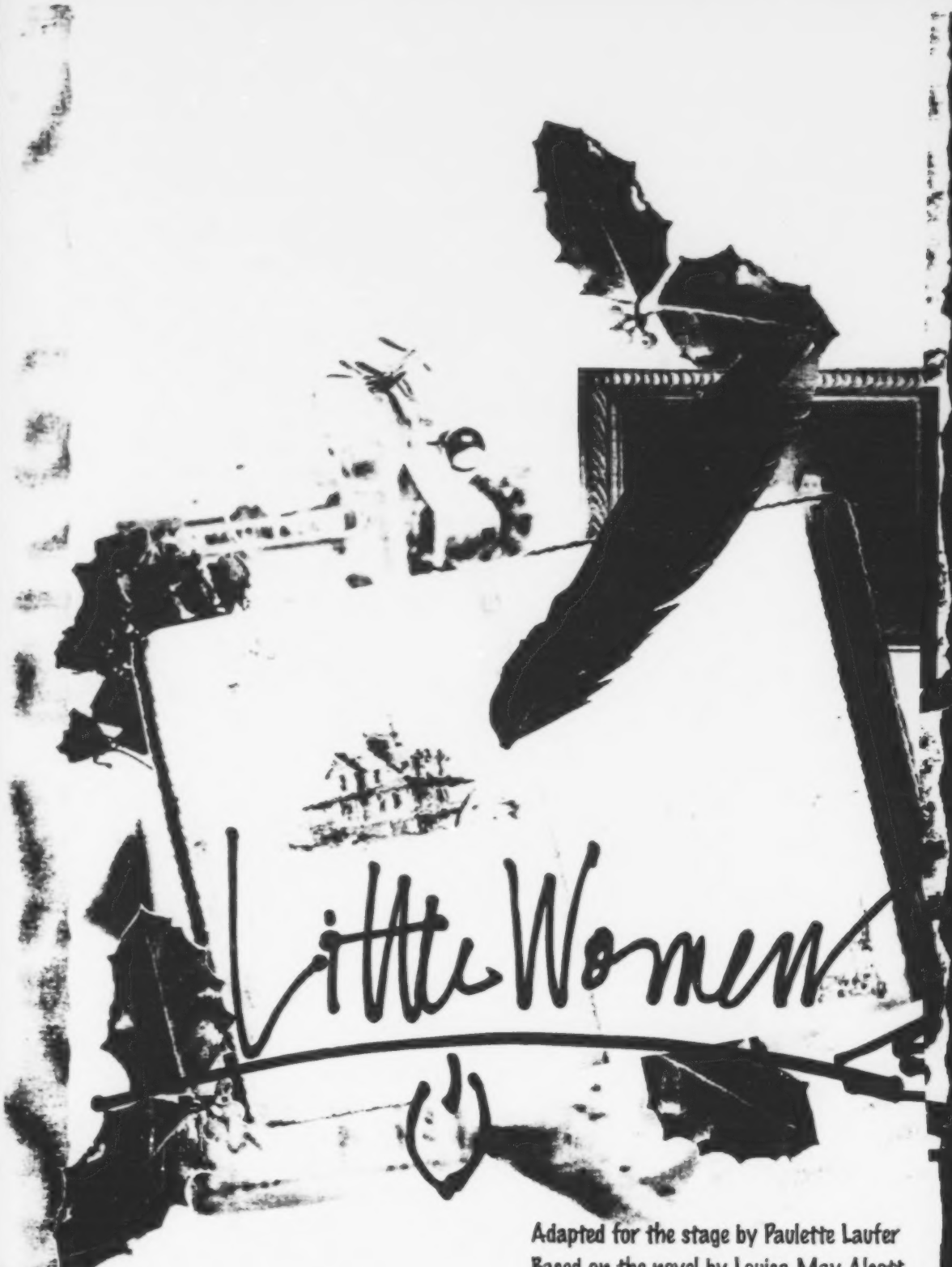

Cue sheet

FOR STUDENTS

Welcome to *Cuesheet*, a performance guide published by the Education Department of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, DC. This *Cuesheet* is designed for use before and after attending a performance of *Little Women*.

Look for the quill pen indicating activities to complete and questions to discuss.

This Cuesheet contains:

From Novel to Stage Play, page 2

Characters and Resources, page 3

Costumes, page 4

Lines, page 5

Adapting a Novel for the Stage, page 6

Your Script, page 7

Rigmarole and The Final Collaborator, page 8

Adapted for the stage by Paulette Laufer
Based on the novel by Louisa May Alcott

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From Novel to Stage Play

First published in 1869, *Little Women* was originally a novel written by Louisa May Alcott. Alcott based *Little Women* on her own youth. The story follows the March sisters growing up in **19th-century New England.** The March family has basic food, clothing, and shelter, but no luxuries. Like the March family, Alcott's family was poor.

Mrs. March, called "Marmee," describes each of her daughters as a "born original": each has unique talents and dreams. Jo, the second-oldest daughter and central character, is a writer. She writes stories and plays to entertain the family. She dreams that her writing will be published some day. Like Jo, Alcott helped to support her family by selling stories she wrote. Meg, a year older than Jo, takes care of her younger sisters. She wants to fall in love and get married. Beth, two years younger than Jo, plays piano. She wants the family to always stay together. Amy, the spoiled youngest child, draws beautiful pictures. She wants to be an artist. Alcott also had a sister who painted.

Both the novel and the play open on Christmas Eve, 1861. Mr. March, the girls' father, is away at the **American Civil War.** He writes home to encourage his "little women" to be brave while he is gone. Written in two parts, the novel covers more than ten years.

The Kennedy Center hired playwright Paulette Laufer to write a 60-minute play based on the book. Because of time restrictions, the playwright chose to focus on five years in the girls' lives: through the war's end, the family's first wedding, a loved one's death, first journeys away from home, and publication of Jo's first story.

During the play, watch how the girls deal with life-changing events in unique ways. How would you react given their circumstances?

19th-century: the years between 1800 and 1900

New England: northeast United States

American Civil War: 1861–1865; between the Union (primarily Northern states) and the Confederacy (primarily Southern states); ended slavery in the United States

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Louis Jambor illustration courtesy Grosset & Dunlap, Inc.; Cover: *Little Women* logo design by Supon Design Group

Characters

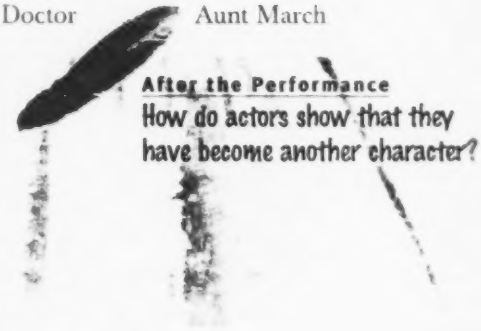
The play focuses on the March sisters. They are **lead** characters. Other characters who help tell the story are **supporting** characters. Only three actors play the ten supporting characters. (Actors who play more than one character in a play are said to be "doubling" roles.)

Lead Characters (ages at play's beginning)

Meg, 16 years | Jo, 15 years | Beth, 13 years | Amy, 12 years

Supporting Characters in doubled roles

Supporting Actor 1	Laurie 16 years	John Brooke (Laurie's tutor)			
Supporting Actor 2	Marmee early 40's	Mrs. Gardiner	Mrs. Hummel		
Supporting Actor 3	Father 47 years	Mr. Laurence	Editor	Doctor	Aunt March



After the Performance

How do actors show that they have become another character?

Louisa May Alcott 1832-1888
author of March Family Stories **Little Women** **Little Men** **Jo's Boys**

Resources

Biographies

Greene, Carol. *Louisa May Alcott: Author, Nurse, Suffragette*. Chicago: Children's Press, 1984.

Johnston, Norma. *Louisa May: The World and Works of Louisa May Alcott*. New York: Four Winds Press, 1991.

Web sites

http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/ALCOTT/LWHP.html

http://www.coppersky.com/louisa

Online copies of *Little Women* are at both web sites!

Costume sketch by Howard Kurtz. Alcott photo courtesy The Louisa May Alcott Memorial Association

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Costumes

Costumes tell about a play's characters before a single word is uttered. They reveal a character's age, time in history, occupation, social status, and attitudes. The costume designer plans costumes that will support a character's development. What do these costume sketches suggest about characters in *Little Women?*

After the Performance

What did the characters wear? What did characters' clothes reveal about their ages, social status, and attitudes? What do your clothes tell about you?

Preliminary costume sketches by Howard Kurtz

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Lines

Lines are words actors speak to tell the play's story and to show characters' feelings. They also reveal how characters grow and change. Here are lines characters may speak at different points in the play. Please note: At the time this *Cuesheet* was written, this play was a work in progress. Lines may change as rehearsals progress.

AMY:
I don't think it's fair for some girls to have plenty of pretty things, and other girls nothing at all.

BETH:
We've got Father and Mother and each other.

MEG:
An invitation from Mrs. Gardiner – Sallie is having a party! ...Oh Jo, Come, you must!

JO:
Oh Meg, but why?

MEG:
Because I so dream of going! I know we don't have fancy dresses to wear, but we'll make up something.

What do the lines suggest about the characters and how they grow and change? Practice saying the lines in different ways. Listen for these lines when you attend the play.

MARMEE:
I know our Christmas eve supper tonight will be simple, but there's a family down the street, the Hummels, and simple is more than they have. Do you think we could share some of it with them?

JO (impetuously):
I'm so glad you asked before we began!

MEG (immediate follow):
Gladly!

BETH & AMY (overlap):
Yes, yes.

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Adapting a Novel for the Stage

The play *Little Women* is adapted from Louisa May Alcott's novel. Adaptation means change. Adapting a novel for the stage sometimes requires changing the story. *Little Women* playwright Paulette Laufer adapted a 600+ page novel (with over 20 characters and numerous crowd scenes) into an hour-long stage play that uses only seven actors. To do this, she needed to solve the following problems:

1) What characters and events are central to telling the story?

2) What characters and events could be combined, simplified, or eliminated?

3) What settings could be simplified to avoid complicated scene changes?

Script It!

To get a feel for the playwright adapter's job, try your hand at adaptation! Here is a description of the beginning of the first scene in the play *Little Women*.

Christmas Eve, 1861. Jo March sits at her desk, writing a play for her sisters to perform. Jo's pet rat, Scrabble, keeps her company. In the parlor, Meg, Beth, and Amy eagerly wait for Jo. Jo finishes writing the play script and carries it into the parlor. Meg, Beth, and Amy crowd around Jo, eager to see what she has written. Jo holds the script close, building her sisters' anticipation. Finally, they convince her to show them the script.

1. Using the next page (and additional pages as needed), adapt the action described above into a play script. Use a pencil so that you can make revisions. The first line, taken from playwright Paulette Laufer's script, is provided for you. Your script must identify the characters and the lines that they speak. (See page 5 for examples.)

2. Your dialogue (lines) must tell the story. (Do not rely too much on stage directions that tell actors to perform actions without speaking words!) Hint: When you're writing, remember that these girls live in the 1800s. Avoid modern expressions and slang.

After you have finished your adaptation...

Discuss the challenges of adapting a story into a script. What was difficult? How long did it take to create the script? Share your script with other "playwrights" who tried this activity. Compare the dialogue choices you made with theirs. Is your script ready to act out?

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Your Script

Little Women: Act I, Scene i

Characters: Jo, Meg, Amy, Beth

JO:
Shhh, Scrabble, it's going to be a grand surprise!

Use additional pages, if needed.

After the Performance

Discuss how the opening scene in the play was similar to and different from your adaptation.

They wanted to play Rigmarole!

Rigmarole (pronounced "RIG-muh-roll")

JO:
My favorite!

LAURIE:
One person starts a story and it becomes –

JO (quickly overlapping):
–a perfect jumble of tragical comical stuff!

Tell a story by playing Jo's favorite game. Play with one friend or more.

The first person starts the story. Where does it takes place? Who is there? What are the characters like?

The next person adds to the story. What happens? Remember: A good story always has a problem.

Keep taking turns adding to the story. What happens next? How does the problem get complicated?

Someone finishes the story. How does the problem get solved? How do the characters feel?

The Final Collaborator is You!

Theater is a collaborative art: **many people work together to create a play.** The actors, costume designer, and playwright are just some of the theatrical collaborators who created *Little Women*. Other collaborators include the director, designers, stage crew, stage manager, and you!

The audience is the final collaborator in creating theater. Before the audience arrives, there is no performance; there is only rehearsal. A play needs an audience, so be ready for your role:

When you arrive, **follow an usher** to your seat.

When the theater lights ("house lights") dim, **listen and watch carefully.** Talking disturbs the performers and other audience members.

Laugh when something is funny! You may even **cry** when something is sad.

And of course, please **clap at the end** of the performance, as the performers bow.

After the bows, **stay seated** until the house lights come on.

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Cuesheet: Little Women

Rosalind Flynn
Cuesheet Editor

Dawn Eddy Molloy
Writer

Paul Dupree Communications
Design

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